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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7217
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0931
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4492
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8022
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5583
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3529
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1360
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000139

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: MANY KAREN SEE ONLY A ROADMAP TO RUIN

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 27

[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 29

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Ethnic Karen and former National Convention delegate Simon Tha told us that he and nearly all of his fellow National Convention delegates regarded the regime's proposed constitutional referendum as a sham. He expected Than Shwe would continue to ignore concerns about the process and proceed with his plan without compromise. Despite this, he did not believe there would be any broad-based, organized opposition to the referendum. Many ethnic groups, including the Karen, are still mistrustful of the NLD and unlikely to cooperate with them. People are upset, he said, but still too afraid and divided to effectively oppose the Than Shwe regime.

[1](#)2. (C) Simon Tha cited evidence suggesting that the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) may have assassinated KNU Secretary General Mahn Sha. He also relayed rumors that another KNU official could have been involved and passed along speculation that the regime was to blame. In the end, however, he acknowledged that he had still not seen any evidence to establish who was responsible or why. End Summary.

ROADMAP TO RUIN

[1](#)3. (C) On February 20, Dr Simon Tha told Poloff he regarded the regime's recently-announced referendum as a complete sham. The former Karen National Convention delegate said he has stayed in touch with many of his former colleagues and reported that nearly all of them had also lost faith in the roadmap. In particular, Simon Tha said Karen ethnic leaders regarded the regime's plan as a "false union" in which a Burman majority would rule over the country's minorities from Nay Pyi Taw or Rangoon. Only the regime's cronies and those in pro-government militias such as USDA and Swan Arr Shin still support Than Shwe's plans, he said. In spite of these mounting concerns over the roadmap, even among former National Convention participants, Simon Tha expected Than

Shwe to continue pursuing his plans "at gunpoint if necessary."

14. (C) While people were upset at the lack of genuine democratic progress, Simon Tha had not heard of any plans to organize a broad-based opposition to the referendum. Civil society is angry, but still too afraid to speak up. "The fish that opens its mouth gets caught," he added. While he acknowledged that some opposition and ethnic groups, including 88 Generation Students and the Karen National Union (KNU), have spoken out against the referendum, he doubted they would have a significant impact or convince many others to speak out. This fear and frustration was dangerous, he noted. If the regime continued with its roadmap without compromise, eventually people would reach their breaking point. Simon Tha said he feared this could lead to violence and bloodshed.

LINGERING MISTRUST

15. (C) Simon Tha had not heard of any plans among the Karen leadership to accept the NLD's invitation to come to Rangoon for talks. Doing so would be practically impossible, he pointed out. Additionally, he noted that Karen continued to mistrust the NLD leadership, including Aung San Suu Kyi. He said many in the Karen community continued to recount stories, true or not, that ASSK's father, General Aung San, had advocated retribution against Karen who had cooperated with the Japanese in World War II. While the KNU leadership remains generally supportive of the NLD's efforts, he said, many others in the Karen community harbor deep-seated mistrust of the Burman majority, making broad-based

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cooperation unlikely.

MAHN SHA ASSASSINATION

16. (C) Simon Tha cited evidence that implicated the DKBA in KNU Secretary General Mahn Sha's assassination on February 14. Many people he spoke with on a recent trip to Karen State believed that fighters from the DKBA's 999th regiment, under the command of Major Chit Thu, carried out the attack in Mae Sot. Simon Tha relayed that a few hours after the assassination, witnesses reportedly saw three men abandon a black pickup truck and cross into an area of Karen State controlled by the 999th regiment of the DKBA. However, he acknowledged that he had not spoken with anyone who had actually witnessed these men cross the river and was relying on hearsay testimony from his Karen contacts.

17. (C) Simon Tha also told us that an officer from Burmese Military Affairs Security informed him that KNU official Nada Mya, son of deceased KNU leader Bo Mya, telephoned an unnamed DKBA official a few days before the assassination. Simon Tha relayed rumors that Nada Mya was interested in pursuing dialogue with the regime and was displeased with Mahn Sha's unwillingness to do so. Most of the people with whom he has spoken thought that the assassination was carried out in retaliation for the January 29 killing of Ler Mu, a colonel in the breakaway KNU Peace Council, but some speculated that Nada Mya might also have played a role. Still others thought the Burmese regime was involved, although Simon Tha acknowledged that he had not yet seen any conclusive evidence to establish who was responsible and why. (note: please see reftels for additional, detailed reporting and analysis of the assassination).

COMMENT

18. (C) Simon Tha, once optimistic about the chances for genuine democratic change, now expects only the worst. The fact that his fellow former National Convention delegates

have also lost faith in the process in which they once participated indicates the depth of mistrust of the Than Shwe regime. That mistrust is well deserved. Than Shwe continues to enforce his will without any room for compromise or regard for human rights. While some have publicly stated they will oppose the regime's planned referendum, many are justifiably scared to speak up. In order to successfully defeat this regime, the Burmese people must overcome their fear and unwillingness to unite. End Comment.

VILLAROSA